

Jesus *or* ʿIsā

عليه



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by

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وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ أَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُوا مِنِّي آلِهَةً مَن دُونِ اللَّهِ
 قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقٍّ إِنْ كُنْتُ قُلْتُهُ
 فَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ تَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ

wa-idh qāla-llāhu yā ʿīsā-b-na maryama ʾaʾanta qulta li-n-nāsi
 ʾittakḥidhūnī wa ʾummiya ʾilāhayni min dūni-llāhi
 qāla subḥānaka ma yakūnu lī ʾan ʾaqūla mā laysa lī bi-ḥaqqin
 iñ kuñtu qultuhu fa-qad ʿalimtaḥu taʿlamu mā fī nafsī
 wa lā aʿlamu mā fī nafsika innaka ʾaānta ʿallāmu alghuyūb

And when Allāh says, “ʿIsā son of Maryam! Did you say to people,
 ‘Take me and my mother as gods besides Allāh?’ he will say,
 ‘Glory be to You! It is not for me to say what I have no right to say!
 If I had said it, then You would have known it.
 You know what is in my self but I do not know what is in Your Self.
 You are the Knower of all unseen things.”

(Sūratu-n-Nisāʾ 4:150)



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

فَأَشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُوا كَيْفَ نُكَلِّمُ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الْمَهْدِ صَبِيًّا
 قَالَ إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ آتَانِي الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا
 وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ وَأَوْصَانِي بِالْصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا
 وَبَرَّأَوُ الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لِي جَبَارًا شَقِيًّا
 وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُرَابَعُثُ حَيًّا
 ذَلِكَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قَوْلَ الْحَقِّ الَّذِي فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ
 مَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ مِنْ وَلَدٍ سُبْحَانَهُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

fa'ashārat 'ilayhi qālū kayfa nukallimu man kāna fi-l-mahdi ṣabiyyā •
 qāla 'innī 'abdu-llāhi 'ātāniya-l-kitāba wa-ja'alanī nabiyyā •
 wa ja'alanī mubārakan 'ayna mā kuṇtu
 wa 'awṣānī bi-ṣ-ṣalāti wa-z-zakāti mā dumtu ḥayyā •
 wa barram-bi-wālidatī wa lam yaj'alnī jabbāran ṣhaqiyyā
 wa-s-salāmu 'alayya yawma wulidtu
 wa yawma 'amūtu wa yawma 'ub'athu ḥayyā.
 dḥalika 'isā-b-nu maryama qawla-l-ḥaqqi-l-ladḥī fihi yamtarūn •
 mā kāna li-llāhi aṇy-yattakḥidḥa mñw-waladin subḥanahu
 'idḥa qaḍā 'amran fa-'innamā yaqūlu lahu kuñ fa-yakūn •

So she pointed to him.

They said, 'How can we speak to an infant in the cradle?'

He said, 'I am the worshipful slave of Allāh.

He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet

and made me blessed wherever I may be

and he has enjoined the ṣalat and the zakāh for as long as I live

and He has made me dutiful to my mother,

and has made me neither arrogant nor bereft of grace.

And peace be upon me the day I was born and the day I will die
 and the day upon which I shall be resurrected to life.'

That is 'Īsā the son of Maryam,

the words of truth about which they dispute.

It is not [conceivable] for Allāh to take a son.

– limitless is He in His Glory –

When He orders anything to be, He says, "BE", and it is.

(Sūratu-l-Maryam 19:29-35)

Jesus or ʾĪsā 𐌹𐌰𐌶𐌰

I will that it shall be called a mystery
For what you are you see for I show you your self.
What I am I alone know and no man else.

Behold me in Truth that I am.
Not what I said but what you are able to know.
You are kin!

You hear that I suffered but yet I did not suffer.
That I was pierced and yet was not pierced.

Nailed to a cross but yet not nailed.
That blood flowed from me but yet I did not bleed.
What they say of me did not happen.
But what they didn't say that did I suffer.

See in me the slaying of the Word.

The piercing of the Word The blood of the Word

The wound of the Word

The crucifixion of the Word and the suffering of the Word.

The Nailing of the Word!

and

the Death of the Word!

Keep silence then my heart — draw in your tongue
for it is a flame.

And from out of his heart he showed me the cross of light
and about the cross a great multitude not having one form
and therein was one form and likeness
above the cross a voice, sweet and gentle, without form spoke.

“It is necessary that one should hear these words from me.

I have a need of one that will hear.

This cross of light is sometimes called the word.

Sometimes a door — Sometimes a way.

Sometimes seed — Sometimes bread.

Sometimes life — Sometimes truth.

Sometimes faith — Sometimes hope.

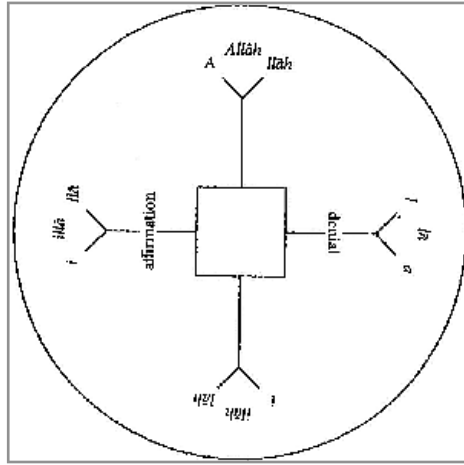
Sometimes love — Sometimes grace.

By these names it is called by men but that which it is in Truth
as conceived of in it's self is that which joins all things to itself.

The multiple of single aspect.

As long as you do not call yourself mine I am not that what I am.
But if you truly hear me you will be as I am for you are what I am.

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ



وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَاتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ
وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ
وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ
وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا • بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

wa qawlihim ʾinnā qatalna-l-masīḥa ʿisa-b-na maryama rasūla-llāhi
wa ma qatalūhu wa mā ṣalabūhu wa lākin shubbiha lahum
wa ʾinna-lladhīna ʾikhtalafū fihi la fī shakkin minhu
mā lahum bihi min ʿilmin illā ʾittibāʿa-ḍḥ-ḍḥanni
wa mā qatalūhu yaqīnā •

bal rafaʿahu-llāhu ʾilayhi wa kāna-llāhu ʿazīzan ḥakīmā

and they said, “We killed the Messiah,

ʿIsā son of Maryam, the Messenger of Allāh.”

They neither killed him nor did they crucify him,

but it only appeared so to them

and truly those who differ are filled with doubts.

They have no real knowledge but only conjecture.

And for certain they did not kill him.

Rather Allāh raised him to Himself. And Allāh is Exalted, Wise.

(Sūratu-n-Nisāa° 4:157-8)

When we begin to look at the relationship between the Christian view of Jesus and the Qurʾānic understanding of ʿIsā ﷺ we find that, whilst there are many areas of basic agreement, beginning with the Virgin birth, the commonality of the relationship inevitably founders on the absolute insistence on the part of Christians that Jesus is “G-d”, albeit this is somewhat hedged by their concept of the Trinity as monotheism and the insistence Jesus was crucified, died and rose from the dead, and that somehow this “sacrifice”, along with the acceptance of the Trinity and his godhood, is *the* salvific act in the redemption of the world and the redemption of the individual from the original sin of Adam ﷺ (the idea of which is another road block in Muslim/Christian understanding and mutuality there not being any original sin, as such, in Muslim theology).

I draw attention to these three things: 1) Original sin 2) The Trinity and 3) The Crucifixion, because as somebody who is a survivor of the endless interfaith conferences of the 60’s through the 90’s I see, in the end, no ground for mutual collaborative understanding between post-Chalcedonian (circa 450ce) believing Christians and Muslims on these three points.

Jesus and ʿIsā ﷺ are simply two very different beings who, while they have some things in common like Virgin birth, basically are theologically estranged. I write/say this as I want the reader/listener to be clear as to whom I am writing about in this essay.

Having said that, I also want to say that there are, especially in pre-Chalcedonian and, especially, Gnostic Christian writings, such as what I have just quoted from the Acts of John where the story of the the beloved disciple, John is related. It tells the story of how he could not handle watching Jesus die, so he went to the Mount of Olives to mourn and weep. After Jesus had been on the cross for six hours, darkness covered the earth, and John received a vision of Jesus in a cave at Gethsemane in which Jesus told John that He did not suffer any of the things people would say He did. Jesus shows John a cross of light and explains that the light represents the divine light and knowledge found deep within each person that only a few are privy to.

There is also The Second Treatise of the Great Seth, which purports to explain that, although Jesus suffered, in actuality it was Simon the Cyrene who was the one crucified on the cross.

Beyond that, there is another alternate understanding of the crucifixion which brought Christians and Muslims closer, in this case through the Ismaʿīlī Shīʿa's who found another way of viewing the crucifixion which is more in line with Christian thought.

Several Ismaʿīlī philosophers of the tenth and eleventh centuries commented on the Crucifixion, including the ʾIkhwān aṣ-Ṣafā, Jaʿfar al-Yaman, Abu Hatim al-Razi, Abu Yaqub al-Sijistani and al-Muʾayyad fi-d-Din aṣh-Shirazī. All of them are in agreement in affirming the historicity of the Crucifixion, confirming that it was indeed Jesus himself who was crucified and not a substitute as maintained by other Qurʾānic commentators, both Sunni and Shīʿa.

For al-Muʾayyad fi-d-Din aṣh-Shirazī, denying the historicity of the Crucifixion contradicts a historical fact established by the testimony of two major religious communities, the Jews and the Christians.

The ʾIkhwān aṣ-Ṣafā (إخوان الصفا) go as far as to narrate the entire story of the Crucifixion of Jesus in their Texts as follows:

“So Jesus went the next day and appeared to the people and summoned them and preached to them until he was seized and taken to the king of the Banu Israʿīl. The king [Herod] ordered his crucifixion, so his physical body (*nasūt*) was crucified, and his hands were nailed to the wooden cross and he stayed crucified from morning till evening. And he asked for water but was given vinegar [to drink]. Then he was pierced with a lance and buried in a place near the cross while forty troops guarded the tomb. And all of this occurred in the presence of the disciples. When they saw him they knew that it was he *certainly* and that he had [not] commanded them to *differ about it*. Then they gathered three days later in a place. And Jesus did appear to them and they saw that mark which was known by them. The news was spread among the Banu Israʿīl that the Messiah was not killed. So the tomb was opened and the physical body (*nasūt*) was not found. Thus, the troops *differed among themselves*. However we know definitively from Allāh ﷻ:

They neither killed him nor did they crucify him,
but it only appeared so to them
and truly those who differ are filled with doubts.
They have no real knowledge but only conjecture.
And for certain they did not kill him.

Rather Allāh raised him to Himself. And Allāh is Exalted, Wise.

(Sūratu-n-Nisāʾ 4:157-8)

The Ismaʿilis, however, in their exegesis affirm that Jesus died in the conventional sense – his physical body (*nasūt*) was crucified and killed. In fact, the Qurʾān confirms in other verses that Jesus did actually die but that his death was ultimately due to the Will of God and not merely the desires of the enemies of Jesus:

Behold! Allāh said:

“Oh ʿĪsā! I will cause you to die (*mutawaffeeka*)

and raise you to Myself and purify you of those who disbelieve;
I will make those who follow you superior to those who reject faith,
to the Day of Resurrection:

Then shall you all return unto me,
and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.”

(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:55)

I said to them nothing but what You ordered me to say:

“Worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord.”

I was a witness against them as long as I remained among them,
but when You took me back to You,
You were the One watching over them. You are Witness of all things
(Sūratu-l-Maʿida 5:117)

The Arabic words *mutawaffeeka* and *tawaffaytanī*, translated as Allāh ﷻ taking the soul of ʿĪsā ﷺ at death, occur throughout the Qurʾān to describe the act of Allāh ﷻ or His Angels taking souls of people when they die. Thus, the Qurʾān asserts that ʿĪsā ﷺ did actually die but attributes his death to the Will of Allāh ﷻ and not the agency of the enemies of ʿĪsā ﷺ.

Thus, even if to all outward appearances *they* did actually *kill and crucify* Jesus, it was only through the mysterious working out of the will of Allāh ﷻ, what Muslims might refer to as divine permission (ʿ*idhīn*). *They* ultimately had no agency in the matter for as Allāh ﷻ says, “it only appeared to them to be so”.

At first glance it may seem that affirming the Crucifixion of Jesus is contradictory to Qurʾān: “They killed him not, nor crucified him, but it was made to appear to them to be so (4:157). But one of the keys to understanding the Ismaʿili interpretation of this verse is the concept of *nasūt* (physical body) and *lahūt* (spiritual body). For the esoteric schools of Islam such as Ṣūfism and Ismaʿilism, the person of the Prophet ﷺ or the ʿImām ﷺ possesses two distinct natures or layers of being. The first is his human nature, called the *nasūt*, and the second is his celestial or divine nature, called the *lahūt*.

The divine nature (*lahūt*) is the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿaqlu-l-kullī*) which is also called the Light of Muhammad (*Nūr Muḥammad*), and it is this Light (*nūr*) which is manifested in the subtle soul of the Prophet ﷺ or the ʾImām ﷺ.

The *nasūt* (human nature) of the Prophet ﷺ or the ʾImām ﷺ is his physical body, which is merely the ‘cover’ for the subtle soul and not the essence of his True Self. It is in this sense that the ʾIkhwān aṣ-Ṣafā used the word *nasūt* in the earlier quoted passage.

With regard to these two natures being present in the Prophet ﷺ, the Muslim philosopher and metaphysician Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr writes:

“The Prophet possessed eminently and in perfection both human (*nasut*) and spiritual (*lahut*) natures. Yet, there was never an incarnation of the *lahut* in the *nasut*, a perspective which Islam does not accept. The Prophet possessed these two natures and for this very reason his example makes possible the presence of a spiritual way in Islam.”

The *nasūt* and the *lahūt* remain as two distinct natures or layers of being; they do not intermix or mingle but exist in a union without confusion. ʾĪsā ﷺ, being one of the resolute Prophets ﷺ of ʾIslām, also possesses the same two natures. The Ismaʿilis were thus able to both confirm and deny the crucifixion of Jesus in accord with this duality: for it is only the physical body or the *nasūt* of Jesus which was crucified on the Cross; the divine reality or *lahūt* of Christ was unaffected and can never be subject to death. His subtle soul and the Light (*nūr*) manifested through it could never be crucified.

The Ismaʿili philosopher al-Muʾayyad, in order to support the position that Christ could never die in reality, cites the Qurʾānic verse:

“Do not imagine that those killed in the Way of Allah are dead.

In no way!

They are alive and provided for in the very presence of their Lord.”

(Sūrah ʾAl ʾImrān 3:169)

Thus neither Jesus nor ʾĪsā ﷺ with respect to his pure soul and his essential reality as the Light (*nūr*) of Allāh ﷻ died in reality (*ʿala ḥaqīqah*). The immutability and ineffability of the Light (*nūr*) of Allāh ﷻ, manifested in the Prophets ﷺ and the Imams ﷺ, is conveyed in the following ʾāyāt of Qurʾān:

They desire to put out the Light of Allāh with their mouths,
and Allāh will not consent save to perfect His Light (*nūr*),
though the unbelievers are averse.

(Sūrah Tawbah 9:32)

I have also earlier juxtaposed into the words of the Act of John a much later explanation of the “Cross” by Abū Yaʿqūb as-Sijistānī from his book *Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ* or the *Book of Wellsprings* on the meaning of the profession (shahadah/الشهادة) of Belief in the statement of the Prophet ﷺ, that *lā ʿilāha ʿilla Allāh* (لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ) is the Key to Paradise; and how that corresponds to the four dimensions of the “Cross” and how these four words indicating the four principles of Denial and Affirmation (*lā* and *ʿilla* respectively) and Partial and Full Truth (*ʿilāha* and *Allāh* respectively) open the door of Origination.

The profession of faith is built on denial and affirmation. The “Cross” is made of two pieces of wood, one of which stands on its own and another piece whose placement depends on the placement of the other – Denial on the left hand and Affirmation on the right hand and Partial truth sunk in the earth and Full Truth raised on High. The left hand is denial (*lā*) the right hand is affirmation (*ʿilla*). That which is sunk in the earth is (*ʿilāha*), the false, whilst that which is raised on high is (*Allāh*), the Truth. The profession of faith is four words, just as the cross has four extremities. The profession of faith has four syllables comprised of three letters. The cross has four angles and three terminations. Each end of the cross has three points making twelve points in all corresponding to the shahadah which derives from three letters (*ʿalif*, *lām* and *hāʾ* لا هـ ا) only, not counting repetitions, in a similar way the cross is a compound of planes, lines and angles. The lines correspond to the *ʿalif*; the planes to the *lām* and the angles to the *hāʾ*. (see diagram p.3)

Just as the shahadah is only completed by being associated with Muḥammad ﷺ (*muḥammad rasulu-llāh/محمد رسول الله*), so the Cross is connected, correctly or incorrectly, with Jesus (and here I mean Jesus not ʿIsā ﷺ). as-Sijistānī comments, “The cross thus becomes a clear sign and evidence for all ranks of the hierarchy and commonality. Christian veneration of the “Cross” is something required of them just as, similarly, our veneration of the *shadah* is required of us as Muslims.”

If you can understand this deeply you will have some way of understanding the reality of the Crucifixion rather than the illusion of the crucifixion for, in Truth, “they neither killed him nor crucified him”.

وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ

Indeed there are many who say that because the post Chalcedonian Christians had gotten it so utterly wrong, that really from that point on, Christianity was in truth a form of Mediterranean (Greek and Roman) neo-Paganism, the advent of the Prophet ﷺ was hastened so as not to leave believers without the possibility of a faith founded on Truth rather than on illusion or outright deception.

A word here on my use of Chalcedonian, which may not be a familiar term to some readers. The Council of Chalcedon held in 451 ce had as its subject how the divine and human relate in the person of Jesus Christ. The Chalcedonian understanding of how the divine and human relate in Jesus of Nazareth is that the humanity and divinity are exemplified as two natures and that the one hypostasis of the Logos perfectly subsists in these two natures. The opposing view is that of Miaphysitism, often called monophysitism, which was adopted mainly by Greek and Eastern Christians and which holds that in the one person of Jesus Christ, divinity and humanity are united in one nature, the two being united without separation, without confusion, and without alteration.

Of course one of the problems for Muslims is how the pure montheistic message of ʿĪsā ﷺ could have become so skewed, for we know that ʿĪsā ﷺ never had, and could not have had, anything to do with any associationist, assimilationist or trinitarian thinking. How could he have since he was a Prophet of Allāh ﷻ and a Hanif.

وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ أَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اخْذُونِي وَأُمِّي الْهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ
قَالَ سُبْحَانِكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقٍّ إِنْ كُنْتُ قُلْتُهُ
فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ تَعَلَّمَ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ

wa-idh qāla-llāhu yā ʿīsā-b-na maryama ʾaʾanta qulta li-n-nāsi
ʾittakhidhūnī wa ʾummiya ʾilāhayni min dūni-llāhi
qāla subhānaka ma yakūnu lī ʾan ʾaqūla mā laysa lī bi-ḥaqqin
iñ kuñtu qultuhu fa-qad ʾalimtaḥu taʾlamu mā fī nafsī
wa lā aʾlamu mā fī nafsika innaka ʾaanta ʾallāmu alghuyūb

And when Allāh says, “Isa son of Maryam! Did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as gods besides Allah?’ He will say, ‘Glory be to You! It is not for me to say what I have no right to say!’

If I had said it, then You would have known it.

You know what is in my self but I do not know what is in Your Self.

You are the Knower of all unseen things.”

(Sūratu-n-Nisāa° 4:116)

Perhaps for a more modern day, and especially for western Christian there might be a question as to why the verse reads:

‘Take me and my *mother* as gods besides Allāh?’

instead of, perhaps,

‘Take me and the *Holy Spirit* as gods besides Allāh?’

but that’s only because it wasn’t until around the same time as Chalcedonia that the idea of the Trinity as the Son, the Mother and the Father shifted. No doubt as a result of the general prevailing misogyny of the European mind they got rid of the Mother from the trinities of polytheistic antiquity such as Osiris, *Isis* and Horus .

Indeed Osiris was a prototypical Jesus. His flesh was eaten in the form of communion cakes of wheat, the plant of Truth. Osiris was ‘Truth,’ and those who ate him became ‘Truth’ also. Each of them became another ‘Osiris,’ a ‘Son of God,’ a ‘Light god,’ a dweller in the ‘Light-god’. Egyptians came to believe that no god, except Osiris, could bestow eternal life on mortals. He alone was their ‘Savior’, the ‘Good One.’ Egyptians were much afraid of death’s corruption awaiting them without the kindly intervention of Osiris.

According to Egyptian scriptures “As truly as Osiris lives, so truly shall his follower live; as truly as Osiris is not dead he shall die no more; as truly as Osiris is not annihilated he shall not be annihilated.” These same concepts still exist in Christian theology. Osiris coming was announced by Three Wise Men: the three stars Mintaka, Anilam, and Alnitak in the belt of Orion, which point directly to the star of Osiris in the east, Sirius, as a sign of his birth. Angelic voices hailed the coming of the ‘Universal Lord’ on this occasion, which marked the rising of the Nile flood.

Certainly, the cult of Osiris contributed a number of ideas and phrases to the Bible. The well known and much loved 23rd Psalm copied an Egyptian text appealing to Osiris the Good Shepherd to lead the deceased to the “green pastures” and “still waters”, to restore the soul to the body, and to give protection in the valley of the shadow of death.

The Lord’s Prayer was prefigured by an Egyptian hymn to Osiris – beginning: “Oh Amun, Oh Amun, Who are in heaven.” Amun was also invoked at the end of every prayer. This word *Amun* (what is not seen), familiar now as ‘*amen*’ is one of the left over ritual refrains of polytheistic mythology buried (as it were) in monotheism.

If I seem to be getting off the subject here it is only because there are so many parallels between what passes for Christianity in the present and the antique polytheistic constructs of Ægypt, Babylonia and the Levant, and when one speaks of the manufactured figure known as Jesus it is hard to see where polytheism leaves off and any kind of monotheism begins, though of course that was not always so.

The question is: where, outside of ʾIslām, can one find what remains of the authentic teachings of the historical Jesus in the present?

Of the many sects that arose just before, during and after the historical Jesus there is one group or perhaps two groups that seem to have followed his direct teachings rather than the blend of Peter and Paul who incorporated Roman and Greek pagan (polytheistic) teachings with the true message of Jesus follower of Yawheh.

The first group, some of who survive in some remote areas of the Middle East into the present time, are the Ebionites.

The majority of Church Fathers, or those who had taken the way of Peter and Paul, anathemised the Ebionites for rejecting the precepts central to Nicene orthodoxy, such as the pre-existence, divinity, virgin birth, atoning death, and physical resurrection of Jesus.

On the other hand, an Ebionite story has Jesus eating bread with his brother Yaqūb (Jacob or James the Just) after the resurrection, which indicates that the Ebionites, or at least the ones who accepted this version of the Gospel of the Hebrews, very much believed in a Jesus that survived the crucifixion in one form or another.

The Ebionites are described as emphasizing the oneness of G-d and the humanity of Jesus who, by virtue of his righteousness, was chosen by G-d to be a messianic “prophet like Moses” who was foretold in Deuteronomy 18:14–22 when he was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Origen and Eusebius recognize some variation in the Christology of Ebionite groups; for example that while all Ebionites denied Christ's pre-existence there was a sub-group which did not deny the virgin birth.

Of the books of the New Testament, the Ebionites are said to have accepted only a Hebrew (or Aramaic) version of the Gospel of Matthew, referred to as the Gospel of the Hebrews, as additional scripture to the Hebrew Bible. which Irenaeus reports, omitted the first two chapters on the immaculate conception and nativity of Jesus, and started instead with the baptism of Jesus by John.

The Ebionites believed that all Jews and Gentiles must observe the commandments in the Law of Moses, in order to become righteous and seek communion with G-d, but these commandments must be understood in the light of Jesus' expounding of the Law, revealed during his sermon on the mount, and other evangelical counsels. The Ebionites may have held a form of "inaugurated eschatology" positing that the ministry of Jesus had ushered in the Messianic Age so that the kingdom of G-d might be understood as present in an incipient fashion, while at the same time awaiting consummation in a future age

Here it would be wise to look at the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes, as these are, perhaps, the most authentic remaining teachings of Jesus.

The Beatitudes (anglicized from the Matthean Vulgate Latin section title: *Beatitudines*) are a set of teachings by Jesus that appear in the Gospel of Matthew (and a longer variation in Luke). They are a proclamation without a narrative and in that way similar to *ḥadīth*, in that they are direct oral spoken teachings of Jesus. The term beatitude comes from the Latin adjective *beatus* which means happy, fortunate, or blissful. Far more than "happiness" or "joy", the word "blessed" in these teachings has been defined as an "exclamation of the inner joy and peace that comes with being right with G-d". Each teaching is proverb-like: cryptic, precise, and full of meaning. Each one includes a topic that forms a major biblical theme. They are expressed as eight blessings in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

Each beatitude consists of two phrases: the condition and the result. In almost all cases the phrases used are familiar from an Old Testament context, but in the sermon Jesus elevates them to a new level of teachings. Together, the beatitudes present a set of ideals that focus on love and humility rather than force and exaction. They echo the highest ideals of the teachings of Jesus on mercy, spirituality, and compassion especially to the poor and suffering.

While opinions may vary as to exactly how many distinct statements the beatitudes should be divided into (ranging from eight to ten), most scholars consider them to be only eight. These eight of Matthew follow a simple pattern: Jesus names a group of people normally thought to be unfortunate and pronounces them blessed.

Blessed are...

- ...the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ...those who mourn: for they will be comforted.
- ...the meek: for they will inherit the earth.
- ...those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled.
- ...the merciful: for they will be shown mercy.
- ...the pure in heart: for they will see God.
- ...the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God.
- ...those who are persecuted because of righteousness: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The above verses are from Mathew 5:3 to 5:10 and are followed in Mathew 5:11-12 by what is often viewed as a commentary or a further clarification of the eighth one, with specific application being made to the disciples. Instead of referencing third-person plural “they”, Jesus changes to second-person “you”:

- Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The four beatitudes in Luke 6:20–22 during the Sermon on the Plain are introduced by Verse 20 which recounts that, “Looking at his disciples, he said:”

Blessed are you...

- ...who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of G-d.
- ...who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.
- ...you who weep now, for you will laugh.
- ...when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of man.

And whilst these “Beatitudes” are never mentioned directly in the Qurʾān we do find some parallels to the expression of the Mercy of Allāh ﷻ and His Prophet, Muhammad ﷺ such as

قُلْ لِلَّهِ ۚ كَتَبَ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

qul li-llāhi kataba ʿala nafsih-r-rahmah

say; “Your Lord has written Mercy on Himself.”

(Sūrah al-Anʿam 6:12)

Jesus or ʾĪsā ﷺ

and

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

wa ma ʾarsalnāka ʾilla raḥmatal-li-ʿalamīn

and We didn't send you except as a mercy for all creation.

(Sūratu-l-ʾAmbiyāʾ 21:107)

as well as in some ḥadīth such as the well known ḥadīth qudsī, where Allāh ﷻ says on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ: “My mercy precedes My wrath”, or ‘has precedence over My wrath’, or “predominates over My wrath,” as well as other ḥadīth with somewhat similar tone, but distinct phraseology, from the Beatitudes.

But rather than going through the somewhat torturous path of trying to find and seeking out parallels in the Qurʾān or, indeed, other world scriptures, especially Buddhist ones, we should look more closely at what Jesus is talking about in the Beatitudes and indeed on his whole Sermon on the Mount which, to this writer at least, seem the most true and authentic of his purported teachings.

As a contemporary fairly secular Christian commentator Tod Lindberg puts it in his essay, *Jesus's Community of Goodwill*, “The Sermon on the Mount has long been rightly understood as both a starting-point and a summation of the teachings of Jesus. It begins with the Beatitudes in which Jesus delineates the categories of people he says enjoy special favor.

“The Beatitudes are all familiar to us [Christians] as sayings, the best known being, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”. But what, really, are they? Is Jesus merely pronouncing a blessing, offering good wishes to those whom he chooses to single out? In fact, there's more to the story than that.

“The Beatitudes provide a dizzying commentary designed to turn upside down the political and social world of the Roman Empire of Caesar Augustus and of the Jewish religious elite of Judea and Jerusalem. This is the opening move of a more drastic and fundamental reassessment of political and social affairs, applying not only to its own time but to all future times, down to our day. More still: It points to the increasing fulfillment in this world of the promise of the human condition as such — and of the struggle against vast and daunting but not insurmountable obstacles that such fulfillment will require.

“Jesus describes those who are truly fortunate, the lucky ones of their day. But it is not [the] emperors, conquerors, priests, and the wealthy who enjoy this favor. Rather, it is the common people, those whom earthly success has largely passed by: the poor, the meek, the persecuted, the peacemakers. How can this be? Because though they may have been denied worldly success, what cannot be taken away from them is their potential to live rightly by one another. It is all too easy for those who enjoy the pleasures of this world to try to float above such obligations. Jesus goes on to say that so long as ordinary people stand for the right things and do not retreat in their rightness before those who seem to have more power, what’s right will prevail. It’s their kingdom – a kingdom organized not from the top down, but from the bottom up. In the Beatitudes, Jesus offers a description of the community of goodwill his teaching will build in this world.

“Each of the Beatitudes includes not only a statement about who is blessed, but also a short description of what is in store for each category of those who are blessed: The meek shall inherit the earth. Are these predictions Jesus is making? Or promises about what the future holds? If so, where? Only in the next world, or in this world as well?

“In order to see the answers to these questions, we have to look at the Beatitudes not just individually, but in relation to each other. With these nine categories, Jesus offers a portrait of the ways in which it is possible to be a good person with respect to others — a description of the various forms human goodness, in this social sense, can take. This description is as true today as it was in his day, and if we are looking for the ways in which it is possible to be a good person today, we really need look no farther.

“As for the predictions or promises, what Jesus has done with them is to imagine the consequences of a world comprised of more and more people attuned to the social good as he has described it. He offers in these few lines a description of what the world looks like when good people prevail over bad people — and he makes the bold claim that such a world will come to pass.

Jesus calls those who belong to the nine categories he specifies in Matthew “Blessed.” Blessed in the sense of the term meaning “fortunate” or “prosperous.”

“Who are the lucky ones? The “poor in spirit” are prosperous; ‘those who mourn’ are fortunate; so are ‘the gentle’; and ‘those who hunger and thirst for righteousness’; and ‘the merciful’; and ‘the pure in heart’; and ‘the peacemakers’; and ‘those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness’; finally, says Jesus, fortunate are ‘you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.’”

By now, we are used to the idea of wishing well for those who are downtrodden, who are oppressed, who can’t get a break, who have fallen on hard times. This is in no small measure a product of the teaching of Jesus himself, in this passage and elsewhere. Those in his time who heard him speak words such as these, however, had a different general outlook and set of expectations. Theirs was a world in which robbers could leave a man for dead on the side of a road, and it was unclear if anyone would stop to help. The exalted were truly exalted – the rich, the royal, the Sadducees and Pharisees, the imperial Roman officers, the tax collectors – who so often treated the have-nots with undisguised contempt.

Here Jesus proposes a different hierarchy. To see whom he elevates in the Beatitudes, it may be helpful to conjure a list of qualities opposite to the ones he lists. Cumulatively, what emerges from this collection of “anti-Beatitudes” is a portrait of a privileged class, the 1% that see those below (the 99%) as essentially inferior. For “the poor in spirit,” the opposite number might be someone arrogant in his righteousness and sense of superiority. For ‘those who mourn,’ we can substitute those whom the world has given cause for rejoicing. For ‘the gentle,’ the overbearing. For ‘those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,’ we may find a contrast in those who are complacent on account of their privileges and defend them vigorously. For ‘the merciful,’ the unforgiving, perhaps the cruel: those who, when they have an advantage over another, even a temporary one, do not hesitate to exploit it.

Opposite ‘the pure in heart’ are those who are cunning in pursuit of their private gain. Opposite ‘the peacemakers’ are those who act to create or aggravate conflict. Opposite “those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness” are those doing the persecuting, as opposite ‘you when people insult you...because of me’ are those seeking to put down the teaching of Jesus and those who follow it.

“Far from feeling any sense of obligation toward those below, this elite dismisses them as irrelevant – or worse, sees them as objects to be used to its own advantage. In addition, the elite seeks to perpetuate its advantages, if necessary by killing, jailing or other wise silencing those (such as Jesus) who speak up for the downtrodden. There was much for the elite to lose if the teachings of Jesus caught on. Indeed, from the beginning of his career, Jesus understood quite clearly the high stakes involved in his political teaching.

“Perhaps privileged classes, in the plural, captures the essence a little more precisely. It is an oversimplification to see the problem as simply one of haves versus have-nots. The have-nots have in common that they are oppressed, but their oppressors come in different guises, from the elite priests (sadducees) of the Temple to the occupying Romans. And we must bear in mind how little it takes to oppress. Some who are oppressed by the powerful above them may in turn oppress those below them with yet less power. Oppression can manifest itself in as little as a declined opportunity to show mercy out of the enjoyment of one’s position of relative power – one’s sense of superiority.

(The latter being of course the Shayṭānic disposition we have often written of in which the Shayṭān says to Adam, I am better than you are. Allāh has made me from fire and you from clay.”

قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ

qāla ma mana°aka alla tasjuda °idh °amartuka

qāla ana khayrun minhu khalaqtanī miñ-nāarin wa khalaqtahu miñ ṭīn

He (Allāh) said,

‘What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you to?’

He (Shayṭān) replied,

‘I am better than him. You created me from fire
and You created him from clay.’”

(Suratu-l-A°rāf 7:12)



“As it turns out, though, the have-nots have more going in their favor than they realize, and this is the message of Jesus. For the poor in spirit, ‘theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ Those who mourn ‘shall be comforted.’ The gentle ‘shall inherit the earth.’ Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ‘shall be satisfied.’”

“While the merciful ‘shall receive mercy.’ and the pure in heart ‘shall see G-d.’ Peacemakers shall even be called ‘sons of G-d.’ and as for those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, again, ‘theirs will be the kingdom of heaven.’

“And for those who are insulted, persecuted, and falsely accused because they adhere to and seek to exemplify the teaching of Jesus, he tells them ‘rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.’

“However, it is not only the next world to which Jesus refers. Most conspicuously, ‘the gentle,’ he says, ‘shall inherit the earth.’ This statement could not be more emphatically rooted in this world. It promises no less than this world itself to the gentle and the humble.

“Note that Jesus does not say the gentle will take over the world or conquer the world: The way in which the gentle come to possess the world is not by becoming something other than what they are. Rather, the world comes to them – as an inheritance, a bequest. The language is striking. One obtains an inheritance upon the death of one’s benefactor. This raises the question: a bequest from whom? We will soon see the answer.

“The gentle are followed by those who desire righteousness. They, unlike the gentle and still less the poor in spirit, have surveyed the world around them and are dissatisfied with it, wishing instead for a world in which their desire for righteousness is fulfilled. Here, Jesus uses metaphorical language: He speaks of those who ‘hunger and thirst’ for righteousness. All people get hungry, all people get thirsty. Hunger and thirst are primordial and universal bodily desires.

“Here Jesus specifies an object of desire that is distinctly human but not of the body: the desire or hunger for righteousness.

“However, the desire Jesus speaks of – the desire for righteousness – is something whose satisfaction, unlike hunger and thirst, is not of the body. Having passed from the permanently dispirited (the poor in spirit) to the incapacitated (those who mourn) to the unstirred spirit of acquiescence (the gentle or meek), we arrive now at the moment when the human spirit becomes an active entity for the first time. People are no longer merely operated on – passive objects played with by natural forces or the will of other, stronger human beings. Instead, they stir of their own will, seeking for themselves something outside themselves.”

“In the desire for food and drink, people are no different from other members of the animal kingdom. Jesus goes on to specify an object of desire that is distinctly human: the desire for righteousness. He invites us to take the desire for righteousness as the first stirring in all those who are not content simply to be, in the passive or debilitated senses he has already evoked.

“So far, Jesus has not specifically said what this “righteousness” people desire is, but his language offers some clues. First of all, the Beatitudes categorize groups of people. He does not say “blessed is the one who is poor in spirit,” but rather “blessed are the poor in spirit”; not “the mourner” but “those who mourn.” From the start, the teaching of Jesus is directed not merely to each solitary person who will one day stand before G-d for eternal judgment; instead, it includes an element that is social or political. It invites listeners – including the most downtrodden and oppressed – to recognize that they are not alone and to think beyond themselves. Wherever one of his listeners may fall, whether in one of his categories of the “blessed” or somewhere outside, the listener is not alone: Jesus calls people to think of themselves in relation to others like them, even if the others are people with whom they previously have felt nothing in common.”

I would invite my Muslim brothers and sisters to look closely into these teachings from the Mountain, especially those Muslims who may not be familiar with the actual teachings of Jesus or ʿĪsā ﷺ.

Allāh ﷻ specifically tells us that all the Prophets ﷺ are brothers and that we should not discriminate between them and so, as Muslims, it is our duty to familiarise ourselves with the teachings of the different Prophets ﷺ in order to better understand them.

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ
وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ
لَا تَفْرُقُوا بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَخَلَّوْا لَهُمْ سُلَيْمُونَ

qūlū ʾāāmannā bi-llāhi wa mā ʾuñzila ʾilaynā wa mā ʾuñzila ʾila
ʾibrāhīma wa ʾismaʿīla wa ʾishāqa wa yaʿqūba wa-l-ʾasbatī
wa mā ʾūtiya mūsā wa ʿīsā wa mā ʾūtiya-n-nabiyyūna mir-rabbihim
lā nufarriqu bayna ʾaḥadin minhum wa naḥnu lahu muslimūna

Jesus or ʿĪsā ﷺ

Say, ‘We have faith in Allah and what has been sent down to us and what was sent down to Ibrahim and Ismaʿil and Ishaq and Yaʿqūb and the Tribes, and what Mūsā and ʿĪsā were given, and what all the Prophets were given by their Lord.

We do not differentiate between any of them.

We are Muslims submitted to Him.’

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:136)



Another New Testament teaching of Jesus which seems cognate with what ʿĪsā ﷺ might have taught is the lesson of The Birds of Heaven which is also referred to as The Flowers of the Field or The Lilies of the Field as recorded in the book of Matthew 6:24–33.

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.

“You cannot serve G-d and the world.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor for your body and what you will wear. Is not life more than meat, and the body more than clothes? Behold the birds of the air: they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor do they gather food into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?

Which of you by thinking about it can add one inch to his height?

And why do you keep thinking about what you will wear? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, nor do they spin: And yet I say to you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed or clothed like any one of these.

So if G-d clothes the wheat in the field, which today is, and tomorrow is put into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, Oh you of little faith?

Therefore don’t think about, ‘What shall we eat?’ or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘In what or with what shall we be clothed?’

For the worldly non-believers seek after all these things but your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.

So seek first the kingdom of G-d, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

A similar passage appears in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas.

36. Jesus said, “Do not fret, from morning to evening and from evening to morning, (about your food—what you’re going to eat, or about your clothing—) what you are going to wear. (You’re much better than the lilies, which neither card nor spin.) As for you, when you have no garment, what will you put on? Who might add to your stature? That very one will give you your garment.”

Another teaching of Jesus that appears cognate with Islamic teaching is The Parable of the Lost Sheep, which appears in two of the Canonical gospels of the New Testament, as well as in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas

In the Gospel of Luke (15:3-7), the parable is told as follows:

“He said this to them: ‘Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep, and lost one of them, wouldn’t leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that was lost, until he found it? When he has found it, he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I tell you that even so there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.’

In the analogy of the Good Shepherd, Jesus is the shepherd, thus identifying himself with the image of God as a shepherd searching for stray sheep in Ezekiel 34:11–16. “these parables are fundamentally about G-d,...their aim is to lay bare the nature of the divine response to the recovery of the lost.”

Similarly there is The Parable of the Lost Coin is one of the parables of Jesus which appears in Luke 15:8-10 and tells the tale of a woman who searches for a lost coin.

In the parable a woman with ten silver coins loses one. She then lights a lamp and sweeps her house until she finds it, rejoicing when she does, for what woman, if she had ten coins and lost one, wouldn’t light her lamp and sweep the house seeking diligently until she found it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.’ “Even so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of G-d over one sinner repenting.”

Then of course there is the most famous of these parables, which is the Parable of the Lost or Prodigal Son.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, also known as Two Sons or The Lost Son and The Running Father.

It appears in the Gospel of Luke (15:11-32) and tells the story of how a father, in response to the demands of one of his sons for his inheritance before his father dies. The younger son, after wasting his fortune ('prodigal' means 'wastefully extravagant'), goes hungry during a famine. He then repents and returns home, where the father holds a feast to celebrate his return. The older son refuses to participate, stating that in all the time he had worked for the father, he did not even give him a goat to celebrate with his friends. His father reminds the older son that everything the father has is the older son's, but that they should still celebrate the return of the younger son as he has come back, as it were, from the dead.

This is the last of three parables about loss and redemption, following the parable of the Lost Sheep and the parable of the Lost Coin, that Jesus tells after the Pharisees and religious leaders accuse him of welcoming and eating with "sinners." The father's joy described in the parable reflects divine love and mercy, "the boundless mercy" (*rahmah*) of G-d and His refusal to limit the measure of His grace."

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

qul yā ʿibādiya-l-ladhīna ʿasrafū ʿala ʾaṅfusihim

lā taqnaṭū mir-rahmati-llāhi

ʾinna-llāha yaḡfiru-dh-dhūnūba jamīʿan

ʾinnahu huwa-l-ḡhafūru-r-rahīm

Say: 'My slaves, you who have transgressed against yourselves,
do not despair of the mercy of Allāh.

Truly Allāh forgives all wrong actions.

He is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.'

(Sūratu-z-Zumar 39:53)

وَاَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ

wa ʾistaghfirū rabbakum

ṭhumma tūbū ʾilayhi ʾinna rabbī raḥīmūn wa dūdā

Ask your Lord for forgiveness and then make tawba to Him.

My Lord is Most Merciful, Most Loving.'

(Sūrah Hūd 11:90)



So considering all of this, it is fair to say and easy to see that the teaching of Jesus as taken from the actual written texts of Christians gives us ample evidence to enable us as Muslims to understand that there are certainly definite parallels and cognates based upon their own teachings as well as major differences having to do with polytheistic Trinitarian lapses which have led to outright recrudescence of Mediterranean paganism, as well as the whole question of the crucifixion including the idea of vicarious salvation.

Of course we also find in earlier gnostic readings of the life of Jesus the Christ, He did not die on the cross as an expiation for sin.

In Gnostic and indeed early Christian and, to a certain degree, Coptic Christianity, salvation (as such) has nothing to do with sin and everything to do with mystical knowledge based on self-actualization. Early Christians and Gnostics believe human beings are divine sparks of light reflecting from the metaphysical cross what we Muslims refer to as the direct witnessing or the *shahadah* (see diagram on p.3) of *lā ʾilāha ʾilla Allāh* (لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ). The spirit within each person is an offshoot of G-d, and Christ came to rescue the sparks who had gone away, which of course goes back to earlier Old Testament and Kaballistic understanding of the Ingathering or *tikkun olam* (Hebrew: תיקון עולם or תיקון עולם), which is a Hebrew phrase that means “repairing (or healing) the world”.

Once people receive this illumination and realize who they really are, they receive the same knowledge of G-d that Jesus had.

Overall, salvation involves achieving a special kind of knowledge not known or available to ordinary Christians. Therefore, human life is merely a prison where the spirit lives until it is liberated at death. On the other hand G-d is totally imminent with a hint of transcendence for the gnostic. He lives inside each person, but the only way to truly know G-d is through a mysterious secret knowledge that only a few people have. There is no salvation from sin, only salvation through mystic knowledge, which comes from within each individual being.

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

wa huwa maʿakum ʾayna mā kuñtum
and He is with you where ever you are
(Sūratu-l-Hadīd 57:4)

Of course one of the reasons we at the Islamic Study Center convene these programs on a monthly basis is to increase and enlarge the knowledge of the Muslim community and others who, perhaps out of curiosity attend or tune in to our webinars though granting access to this “mysterious secret knowledge.”

Recently I ran across a brilliant introduction to the subject of Divergences and Convergence and Barriers to Understanding by Dr Karim Crow where he wrote (more or less as I have edited it somewhat to fit the boundaries of this essay), “The overall shallowness of knowledge about Allāh ﷻ, the life of the Prophet ﷺ [and Prophets ﷺ] and the history of the early Community [and earlier communities of believers] among today’s younger generation of Muslims is a cause of genuine concern....Many Muslims today are not well informed about ʿIslāmic history and thought, and they often entertain vague ideas about the early development of Islam [Sunni, Shiʿah and Ṣūfī]. A growing number of contemporary Muslims – motivated either by ignorance or intolerance – deny the legitimacy of any expression of religious practice or doctrine that is different from the one they were born into. Regrettably, such a Deformist mindset is now becoming widespread, misleadingly labeled “Salafist”, “Deobandi” or “Wahhabi”. This mentality strongly condemns the intellectual diversity of ʿIslām’s rational and spiritual legacies expressed in the legal theories of the schools of fiqh, in theology, in philosophy, in Sufi transformative practice and metaphysics (*taṣawwuf*), in favor of a coerced doctrinal uniformity characterized by an anti-rationalist intellectual minimalism. This current Deformist trend seeks to impose a shallow conformity rather than depth and diversity in religious knowledge, to coerce others to think and talk as they themselves do, and views everything in black-and-white rather than in full color. The intent of Deformists is to monopolize and control the thinking of Muslims by means of a tyranny over thought and speech that is in reality a serious abuse of authority.” And a tyranny which we hope to break or at least put a dent in through this series of writings and talks.

I hope in the second half of this essay, after touching on the idea of Jesus and ʿĪsā ﷺ as *Word* from early Christian and Biblical sources, and to write about what we can similarly understand about ʿĪsā ﷺ from Qurʾān, Ḥadīth and the thought and writings of some Muslim scholars. To start at the beginning in the Gospel of John:

“1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with G-d, and the Word was G-d. 2. He was with G-d in the beginning. 3. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[a] it.

6. There was a man sent from G-d whose name was John. 7. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of G-d. 13. children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a man's will, but born of G-d.”

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

The light of the world (τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου). Not λύχνος, a lamp, as John the Baptist (John 8:35). Light is another of John's characteristic terms and ideas, playing a most important part in his writings, as related to the manifestation of Jesus and His work upon men. He comes from G-d, who is light (1 John 1:5). “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). The Word was among men as light before the incarnation (John 1:9; John 9:5), and a light that came with his birth (John 3:19-21; John 8:12; John 12:46). Jesus is light through the illuminating energy of the Spirit (John 14:21, John 14:26; John 16:13; 1 John 2:20, 1 John 2:27), which is received through love (John 14:22, John 14:23). The object of the work of Jesus is to make men to be sons of light (John 12:36, John 12:46), and to endow them with the light of life (John 8:12).

Light was one of the names of the Messiah. See Isaiah 9:1; Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 60:1-3; Malachi 4:2; Luke 2:32. Isaiah 42:6, as well, alludes to the sun in the firmament; whose light is diffused to all the nations of the earth, and not confined to one spot of land only.

Hence “Jesus Light of the World”. “I am the light of the world.” The fountain from which comes an intellectual light and spiritual understanding proceed: without me all is darkness, misery, and death. The Divine Being was, by the rabbi’s so named – “The light of the world”. So in Bamidbar Rabbi: “The Israelites said to G-d, Oh Lord of the universe, You order us to light lamps to You, yet You are The Light of The World: and with You dwells the light.”

Jesus, by saying what he did, therefore, takes to himself a well known aspect or attribute of the Supreme Being; and for this reason the Jews were greatly offended by the words of Jesus.

He further says that those who follow him, “Shall not walk in darkness but will be saved from ignorance, infidelity, and sin. If you follow me, become my disciple, and believe on my name, you shall have my Spirit to bear witness with his, that you are a child of G-d. You shall have the light of life – such a light as brings and supports life.” The sun, the fountain of light, is also the fountain of life: by its vivifying influences, all things live – neither animal nor vegetative life could exist, were it not for the influence of the Sun. Thus Jesus, is the “Sun of righteousness”, (Malachi 4:2,) and the Spiritual Sun which is the fountain of all spiritual and eternal Life. His light brings life with it, and they who walk in his light live in his life.

And this Light proceeds from the Word. Thus the Word and the Light are intimately connected.

[Just as interjection we should also try to understand what is meant by, “Child of G-d” as for Muslims, as well as Jews, this comes very close to blasphemy since G–d, as such

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

lam yalid wa lam yīlad

He neither begets nor is He begotten.

(Sūratu-l-ʾIkhḫlās 112:3)

So how shall we understand this utterance of Jesus that those “who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of G-d. Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a man’s will, but born of G-d.” that is to say “a spiritual birth”.

As we mentioned earlier we find in Matthew (5:9) “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of G-d.”

Looking further we find that this “birth” is: 1. not of blood 2. not of the will and 3. not of the flesh. (John 1:11-23)

So what is meant by a child of G-d is someone who is born or, perhaps better, re-born spiritually, not physically. Humanity lost that degree of intimacy known as spiritual sonship/daughtership at the time of the Fall; it is in this restored likeness to one's original state that one emerges from a spiritual rebirth which restores "the likeness and image of grace which was the condition of ʾĀdam and Hawāʾ ﷺ in the garden (created the human being in the best of forms/*laqad khalaqna-l-ʾiṣāna fi ʾaḥsani taqwīm*) before they disobeyed Allāh ﷻ," which was all understood by Allāh ﷻ and was His Purpose indeed in placing our parents on this earth that we might come again to realise the Truth of our being, for by Allāh ﷻ ʾĀdam ﷺ was not brought down to the earth to be lessened but to be ful-filled! He, praised be He on High, decided to bring him down to the earth before He ﷻ created him, as we know from his words,

إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

ʾinnī jāʿilun fi-l-ʾarḍi khalīfah

surely shall I place upon the earth a representative.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:30)

So when we read the words "child of G-d" we are not reading words that are in any way to be taken anthropomorphically or polytheistically or as associationalism (*hullul* or *tajīd*) but rather what is being referred to in English (in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, this is phonetically: *Barei Illaha* and in Greek it is: αἰδί του Θεού) is a spiritual birth in the light of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ) Hopefully this removes any understandable squeamishness when encountering such words on the part of the Muslim or Jewish reader.

Let's go back to the very first lines of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word...the Word was light...in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people." Here John, is echoing the words from Genesis I. "1 In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth. 2. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of G-d was hovering over the waters. 3. And G-d said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4. G-d saw that the light was good, and separated the light from the darkness." John proclaims Jesus is the Light of the world sent to bring light to the world so people will not walk in darkness and will be saved from ignorance, infidelity, and sin and shall have the light of life – A life lived in love, and loved by Light:

For Muslims (as with modern physicists) the “Word” is the Divine Imperative “Kun” (كن) which brings all things into being (فيكون).

بَدَعَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

badiʿu-s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi wa-ʾitḏḥa qadā ʾamran
fa-ʾinnamā yaqūlu lahu kun fayakūn

the Originator of the heavens and earth.

When He decides on something, He just says to it, ‘Be!’ and it is.
(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:117)

From this perspective then Jesus can be understood to be a manifestation of the Divine Imperative to “Be” and he was.

مَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ مِنْ وَلَدٍ سُبْحَانَ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

mā kāna lillāhi aṇy-yattakhidḥa miṇw-waladīn subḥanahu
ʾidḥā qadā ʾamran fa-ʾinnamā yaqūlu lahu kun fayakūn

It is not fitting for Allāh to have a son. Glory be to Him!

When He decides on something, He just says to it, ‘Be!’ and it is.
(Sūrah Maryam 19:35)

which must be seen in the light of:

قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ إِذَا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

qālat rabbi ʾanna yakūnu lī waladun wa lam yamsasnī basharun
qāla kadḥaliki-llāhu yakḥluqu ma yashāʾu
idḥā qaḍa ʾamran fa-ʾinnamā yaqūlu lahu kun fayakūn
she [Maryam] said,

‘My Lord! How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?’

He said, ‘It will be so. Allah creates whatever He wills.’

When He decides on something, He just says to it, ‘Be!’ and it is.
(Sūrah ʾĀl ʾImrān 3:47)

Allāh ﷻ, therefore, states that Jesus was created from the act of will of Allāh ﷻ. In the Qurʾān this is compared with the creation of Adam, where Allāh ﷻ created Adam ﷺ by His act of will (*kun-fa-yakūn* / كُنْ فَيَكُونُ), meaning ‘Be and it is.’). Also according to Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān, the same answer was given to the question of Zakariya ﷺ, when he asked how his wife, Elizabeth, could conceive a baby, as she was very old. when he said: “O my Lord! when shall I have a son, and my wife is barren, and I have reached the extreme degree of old age?” (Sūrah Maryam 19:8)

He (Jibrīl ﷺ) said: “So shall it be, your Lord says: It is easy for Me, and I created you before, when you were nothing.” (Maryam 19:9)

Here we see that ʿAdam, Yahyā and ʿĪsā ﷺ were all created by the Divine Power of the Word. So we can more easily understand the Gospel of John where he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with G-d, and the Word was G-d. He was with G-d in the beginning.” For where else would or could he be?

وَالَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَجَعَلْنَاهَا وَابْنَهَا آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ

wa-llatī aḥsanat farjahā fanafakḥnā fihā mir-rūḥnā
wa jaʿalnāhā wa-bn-ahā ʿāyatan li-l-ʿāmin

And she [Maryam] who protected her private parts.

We breathed into her some of Our Rūḥ

and made her and her son a Sign for all the worlds.

(Sūratu-l-ʿAmbiyāʾ 21:91)

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ
رَبِّهَا وَكُنْتِ مِنَ الْقَانِنِينَ

wa maryama ibnata ʿimrāna-l-latī aḥsanat farjahā
fa-nafakḥnā fihi mir-rūḥinā wa ṣaddaḡat bi-kalimāti rabbiḥā
wa kutubihi wa kānat mina-l-qānitīn

And Maryam, the daughter of ʿImrān, who guarded her chastity

— We breathed Our Rūḥ [Spirit] into her —

and she confirmed the Words of her Lord and His Books

and was one of the obedient.

(Sūrat Taḥrim 66:12)

He [who was formed of the Rūḥ]

will teach the Book and the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel,

And he will be Apostle to the children of Israel, (saying:)

‘I have brought you a Sign from your Lord.

I will create the shape of a bird out of clay for you
and then breathe into it and it will be a bird by permission of Allāh.

I will heal the blind and lepers, and bring the dead to life,
by permission of Allāh.

I will tell you what to eat and what to store up in your homes.

There is a Sign for you in that if you are believers.

I come confirming the Torah which I find already here,
and to make lawful for you

some of what was previously forbidden to you.

Jesus or ʿĪsā ﷺ

I have brought you a Sign from your Lord.

So be aware of Allāh and obey me.

Allāh is my Lord and your Lord so worship Him.

That is a straight path.’

(from Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:48-51)



This is ʿĪsā ﷺ according to the Word of Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān and yet it is also recognizably the Jesus of the New Testament or ʿInjīl.

Here is demonstrably a meeting place between what must be true in Christianity because we find it confirmed by Allāh ﷻ.

Certainly we have tried to clarify the differences such as Original Sin, the Doctrine of the Trinity, vicarious salvation, and the Crucifixion vs. the real Crucifixion in the sense of the mystery of the meaning of the profession (*shahadah*/الشهادة) of Belief in the statement that there is no deity but Allāh (*lā ʿilāha ʾilla-llāh*/لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ) and how it relates to the cross in reality rather than in illusion.

Up to this point I have sought mainly to try to explain to my Muslim brothers and sisters points of convergence and divergence between Jesus and ʿĪsā ﷺ in the hopes of some common ground between us even after the various Nicaean, Chalcedonian, Constantinian and Ephesian councils held by the church from 327 to 788 ce and which in time brought about the return of the Mediterranean paganism and the Paganism of the European Forests (by which I refer to, among other things, the dates of the birth of Jeus and the time of the winter solstice, the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus at the time of the spring equinox, the eating of pig (ham) at Easter, the bringing of a tree into the house at Christmas time and various other vestigial remains of Pagan European Forest folk religion.

In any case I do not wish to belabor these points or create unnecessary ill will but to say we Muslims can certainly see that the prior to the Nicean through Ephesian narratives many similarities between early Christianity and what we believe as Muslims, which is only natural since Allāh sent both ʿĪsā ﷺ and Muḥammad ﷺ as prophets to the world and they, of necessity, must have testified to the same truth even if in different ways; for each of the Prophets ﷺ spoke to their people through the existant paradigm of their culture viz. Ibrahīm ﷺ and Fire, Mūsā ﷺ and Majick, ʿĪsā ﷺ and Healing and Muḥammad ﷺ in Eloquence and Chivalry, for through these ways their people might more easily know and understand them.

Now, hopefully, in some small way having explained something of Jesus to Muslims and introduced ʿĪsā ﷺ to Christian (and other) readers, I would like to go deeper in the second half of this essay/talk on the ʿIslāmīc understanding of the Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ

ʿĪsā ﷺ is the fifth of the illustrious resolute prophets (*ʿulu-l-aḍḥim*) ﷺ. Allāh ﷻ mentions ʿĪsā ﷺ in the Qurʾān in some twenty-two passages ranging in length from between one and thirty one ʿāyat. Due to the position he occupies with Allāh ﷻ and in Qurʾān one cannot be a Muslim without wholeheartedly believing in ʿĪsā ﷺ who is variously called, ʿĪsā ﷺ, the son of Maryam, and as the Messiah (*al-Masiḥ*/المسيح).

In the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) a messiah (or *mashiach*) is a king or High Priest traditionally anointed with holy anointing oil. However, messiahs were not exclusively Jewish, as the Hebrew Bible refers to Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, as a messiah for his decree to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple. The Jewish religious messiah is a leader who is anointed by G-d, and physically descends from the Davidic line, who will rule the united tribes of Israel and herald the Messianic Age of global peace also known as the World to Come.

The translation of the Hebrew word *Mašīaḥ* (משיח) as Χριστός (Khristós) in the Greek Septuagint became the accepted Christian designation and title of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe that prophecies in the Hebrew Bible (especially Isaiah) refer to a spiritual savior and believe Jesus is that Messiah (Christ/Khristós).

Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān proclaims that ʿĪsā bin Maryām ﷺ, was the promised Prophet and Messiah sent to the Israelites, and the Prophet ﷺ says that he will return again to Earth at the end of times, along with al-Mahdi ﷺ, (the Rightly Guided One) and together they will defeat Masiḥ ad-Dajjal, the “false Messiah” or the Antichrist.

The word *masaḥa* (مسح) in Arabic has the meaning of rubbing (as in anointing) and refers to the miracles granted to ʿĪsā ﷺ to heal by the laying on his hands and rubbing them over people.

أُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

ʿubriʿu-l-akmaha wa-l-abraṣa wa ʾuḥyi-l-mawtā bi-ʾidḥni-llāh

“I will heal the blind and lepers, and bring the dead to life,
by the permission of Allāh.”

(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:49)

The figures closely connected to ʿĪsā ﷺ in the Qurʾānic text are his grandmother Hanna, his mother Maryam ﷺ, his uncle, the Prophet Zakariya ﷺ and his cousin, the Prophet Yaḥyā ﷺ.

إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي
مُحَرَّرًا فَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

ʿidh qālati imraʾatu ʿimrāna rabbi ʿinnī nadhartu laka mā fī baṭnī
muḥarraran fa-taqabbal minnī ʿinnaka ʾaṅta s-samīʿu-l-ʿalīm

Remember when the wife of ʿImrān said,
‘My Lord, I have pledged to You what is in my womb,
devoting it to Your service. Please accept my prayer.
You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.’

(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:35)

ʿImrān was of the Levite priest caste, a descendant of Yaqūb ﷺ through both Dāūd and Hārūn ﷺ, and was in charge of the prayers and sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. His wife was Hannah who was also a descendant of Hārūn ﷺ and a believer. Her husband, ʿImrān, died when she was pregnant. Hannah felt sure the child she bore was surely a boy and so made a vow to Allāh ﷻ to pledge the son she felt she was carrying to the service of the Temple (3:36) but when her time came she found that it was a girl which was confused her as she had all along been planning to have a boy and give this boy in service to the Temple. The name of this girl child was Maryam ﷺ who was to be the future mother of ʿĪsā ﷺ. Her name in Hebrew means female worshipper or handmaiden.

ʿImrān had been an important person at the Temple and he had an aged relative who was also in service in the Temple and who was the husband of Hannah’s aunt. His name was Zakariyā ﷺ (زكريا). He became known in time as a Prophet and was the father of Yaḥyā ﷺ (يحيى), born to him and his wife Ishḥaʾ (or in some texts ʿAshyā) in their old age similar to the story of Sarah and ʿIbrāhīm ﷺ.

Thus Yaḥyā ﷺ was the older first cousin of ʿĪsā ﷺ and is known to the Christian world as John the Baptist.

In any case, although it was somewhat unprecedented, Hannah took Maryam ﷺ to the temple when she was at an early age and gave her over to the care of the priests who, because of the fame and honor of her father, ʿImrān, cast lots for her.

As it turned out the lots (pens or quills) of the twenty-seven other priests who cast lots for her (3:44) were swept away in the currents of the Jordan River and only that of Zakariyā ﷺ remained visible.

So it was that Maryam ﷺ grew up in the Temple under the care of her aunt and uncle of whom Allāh ﷻ has said,

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا إِتْسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ
وَيَدْعُونََنَا رِعَابًا وَرَهَبًا وَكَانُوا لَنَا خَاشِعِينَ

ʾinnahum kānū yusārīʿūna fi-l-khayrāti

wa yadʿūnanā ragħaban wa rahaban wa kānū lanā khāshīʿin

They outdid one another in good actions,
calling out to Us in yearning and in awe,
and humbling themselves to Us.

(Sūratu-l-ʾAmbiyāʾ 21:90)

Because the students of the priests were all boys, Zakariyā ﷺ made a secluded place known as a miḥrāb (محراب) for prayer and service in the temple for Maryam ﷺ. Some say it was underground and some of those who say this say that it was in a room located underneath the Rock which is at the center of the present Dome of the Rock or the Qubbat as-Sakḥrah in al-Quds (*wa-llāhu ʿalim*). Here she stayed living in seclusion engaged in prayer and contemplation except during the time of her monthly period when she would go to the house of her aunt to stay. Gradually people began to hear about her and she became known for deep piety and then, in time, certain signs were manifest upon her, the most well known of which was that in the miḥrāb in which she dwelt there was always food and in summer you could find the fruit of winter whilst in winter that of summer. Allāh ﷻ says that, “each time Zakariyā went to her in the miḥrāb he found provisions with her.” and asked her, “Oh Maryam from where does this come?” to which she replied, “It is from Allāh.” For “indeed Allāh provides for whoever He wishes without recokning.” (Sūrah ʾAl ʿImrān 3:37).

As her worship deepened and prayers grew stronger and she grew older she began to be visited by angels, who said to her.

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ
الْعَالَمِينَ • يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ

Jesus or ʿĪsā ﷺ

wa-idh qālātī-l-malāʾikatu yā maryamu
ʿinna-llāha ʾiṣṭafākī wa tahharakī wa ʾiṣṭafākī ʿala nisāʾi-l-ʿālamīn •
yā maryamu ʾuqnutī li-rabbikī wa ʾsjudī wa irkaʿīe maʿa a-r-rākīʿin

And the angels said, 'Maryam,
Allāh has chosen you and purified you.
He has chosen you over all other women.

Maryam,
obey your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow!
(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:42-43)

It should be known that Maryam ﷺ is mentioned more in the Qurʾān than in the entire New Testament and she is also the only woman mentioned by name in the Qurʾān.

And as we mentioned in the ʾāyāt just above, her rank is that of the highest among women.

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءٍ

wa-idh qālātī-l-malāʾikatu yā maryamu
ʿinna-llāha ʾiṣṭafākī wa tahharakī wa ʾiṣṭafākī ʿala nisāʾi-l-ʿālamīn

And the angels said, 'Maryam,
Allāh has chosen you and purified you.
He has chosen you over all other women.

(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:42)

According to a well known ḥadīth of at-Tirmidhī, the Prophet ﷺ ranked her as one of the four greatest women of the Garden:

1. Sayyidatinā Maryam bint ʿImrān ﷺ mother of ʿĪsā ﷺ
2. Sayyidatinā ʾAsīyah ﷺ the adoptive mother of Mūsā ﷺ
3. Sayyidatinā Khadija bint Khuwaylid ﷺ the wife of our Prophet ﷺ
4. Sayyidatinā Fatima az-Zahrā ﷺ daughter of our Prophet ﷺ

We find that Maryam ﷺ is given many names in the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth denoting her high position as one of the Queens of ʾIslam ﷺ. Qānitah: Maryam ﷺ in Sūrah Taḥrīm 66:12 is called Qānitah, which means, not only constant submission to Allāh ﷻ, but deep absorption in prayer and invocation, meanings that coincide with the image of Maryam ﷺ spending her youth in the Temple.

Ṣiddiqah: She who confirms the truth or who has faith. She is called this twice in the Qurʾān (al-Maʾidah 5:73) (Taḥrīm 66:12). Also meaning, she who believes sincerely and is completely honest.

Sājidah: She who prostrates to Allāh ﷻ in worship. Allāh ﷻ says: “Oh Maryam! Worship your Lord devoutly: prostrate yourself” (ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:43).

Rākīʿah: She who bows down to Allāh ﷻ in worship. Allāh ﷻ says: “Oh Maryam! Bow down in prayer with those men who bow down.” a command was repeated by angels only to Maryam ﷺ.

Tāḥirah: She who is purified (ʿĀl ʿImrān 3: 42).

Mustāfiā: She who was chosen. Allāh ﷻ says: “Oh Maryam! Allāh ﷻ has chosen you and purified you and again he has chosen you above the women of all nations.” (ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:42).

Ṣaʿimah: She who fasts. Maryam ﷺ is reported to have fasted for six months out of the year.

Many other names of Maryam ﷺ can be found in other books and religious collections. In *ḥadīth*, she has been referred to by names such as Baṭūl and Adḥrā or the Ascetic Virgin and Marḥumah or she who is enveloped in the Mercy of Allāh ﷻ.

Indeed as Dr. Aliah Schleifer writes in her book on Maryam ﷺ, “According to the classical Sunni scholars, Mary is thus by virtue of the Will of God a spiritual luminary who in her primary role as a woman slave of God became an ideal of sincerity, faith, devoutness, submission and purity, and who by virtue of these characteristics was opened to the eternal word of God and *then* granted the secondary role of mother. Mary is thus a sign for all Muslim believers, male or female.”

So this then is the woman ﷺ who, after years of worship, fasting and self surrender, Allāh ﷻ chose above all other women to send one of his highest Angels to blow into her the Spirit who would be ʿĪsā ﷺ.

وَالَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَجَعَلْنَاهَا وَابْنَهَا آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ

wa-llatī ʾaḥṣanat farjaha fanafakḥnā fihā mir-rūḥinā
wa jaʿalnāhā wa-b-nahā ʾāyatan li-l-ʿālamīn

Remember the one who guarded her chastity.

We breathed into her from Our Spirit

and made her and her son a sign for all people.

(Sūratu-l-ʾAmbiyāʾ 21:91)

This Annunciation by the Angel was followed by her pregnancy, which made it impossible for her to continue to stay in the Temple and which led to many questions and suspicions as to the true nature of her character on the part of those who always are filled with questions and suspicions and live to create trouble (*fiṭnawī*).

This in turn led for her to leave the temple as Allāh ﷻ says,

فَحَمَلْنَاهُ فَانْبَدَتْ بِهِ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا

fahamalat-hu fā-ʾn-tabadḥat bihi makānan qaṣiyyā

So she conceived him and withdrew with him into the wilderness.

(Sūrah Maryam 19:22)

The time in the wilderness was a time of tremendous trial which culminated in her giving birth all alone in the middle of nowhere.

As Allāh ﷻ says,

فَاجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ بِأَلَيْتِي مَتُ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَنْسِيًّا

fā ʾajāʾaha-l-makhāḍu ʾilā jidḥi-n-nakhlati

qālat yā laytanī mittu qabla hadḥa wa kuṇtu nasyam-mansiyyā

and when pains of labor drove her to the trunk of a date-palm.

She cried out,

‘Oh if only I had died before this

and was something discarded and forgotten!’

(Sūrah Maryam 19:23)

Among the *mufassarīn* there are those who say that this saying of despair refers to her foreknowledge at the moment of the birth of ʾĪsā ﷺ that there would be those who took him and her to be gods and would worship them..

In any case it is clear that she did indeed suffer but, *alḥamdulillāh* Allāh ﷻ in His Mercy and this is also a great sign of her high station, for Allāh ﷻ spoke to her and she heard, though some say it was an angel who called to her...*wa-llāhu ʿalim*

فَنَادَاهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَا خِزْنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ خِزْنًا سَرِيًّا

وَهُزِّي إِلَيْكِ بِجِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسَاقِطُ عَلَيْكِ رُطَبًا جَنِيًّا • فَكُلِي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا

fanādāhā min taḥtiha allā taḥzanī qadā jaʿala rabbuki taḥtaki sariyyā

wa huzzī ʾilayki bi-jidḥi-n-nakhlati tusāqit ʿalayki ruṭaban janiyyā

fakulī wa-shrabī wa qarrī ʿaynā

A voice called out to her from under her

‘Do not grieve! Your Lord has placed a small stream at your feet.

Shake the trunk of the palm towards you

and fresh, ripe dates will drop down upon you.

Eat and drink and cool your eyes.’

(Sūrah Maryam 19:24-5)

and after this the voice commanded her:

فَمَا تَرَكْنَ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أُكَلِمَ الْيَوْمَ مَرَأْسِيًّا

f-aʾimmā tarayinna mina-l-baṣhari aḥadan
faqūlī ʾinnī nadḥartu li-r-rahmāni ṣawman
falan ʾukallima-l-yawma insiyyā

If you should see anyone at all, just say,
“I have made a vow of abstinence to the All-Merciful
and today I will not speak to any human being.”
(Sūrah Maryam 19:25)



...and this bring us back to the beginning of this essay.

فَأَشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُوا كَيْفَ نُكَلِّمُ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الْمَهْدِ صَبِيًّا
قَالَ إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ آتَانِي الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا
وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أُنَبِّئُ مَا كُنْتُ وَأَوْصَانِي بِالْصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا
وَبَرَأَوُا الدِّينَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا
وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا
ذَٰلِكَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قَوْلَ الْحَقِّ الَّذِي فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ

faʾashbārat ʾilayhi qālū kayfa nukallimu man kāna fi-l-mahdi ṣabiyyā •
qāla ʾinnī ʾabdu-llāhi ʾātāniya-l-kitāba wa-jaʿalanī nabiyyā •
wa jaʿalanī mubārakan ʾayna mā kuntu
wa ʾawṣānī bi-ṣ-ṣalāti wa-z-zakāti mā dumtu ḥayyā •
wa barram-bi-wālīdatī wa lam yajʿalnī jabbāran ṣhaqiyyā
wa-s-salāmu ʿalayya yawma wulidtu
wa yawma ʾamūtu wa yawma ʾubʿathu ḥayyā.
dḥalika ʿisā-b-nu maryama qawla-l-ḥaqqi-l-ladḥī fīhi yamtarūn •

for when she went among her people they began to call her names saying that she had come with something very strange (meaning a bastard son) and they likened her, she who had come from the line of the prophet Harūn and whose father was a good man, to a common prostitute and whore. Now it was clear why the Voice had told her not to “talk to anyone” and so —

“So she pointed to him.

[And] they said, ‘How can we speak to an infant in the cradle?’

He said, 'I am the worshipful slave of Allāh.
He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet
and made me blessed wherever I may be
and he has enjoined the ṣalat and the zakah for as long as I live
and He has made me dutiful to my mother,
and has made me neither arrogant nor bereft of grace.
And peace be upon me the day I was born and the day I will die
and the day upon which I shall be resurrected to life.'

That is ʿĪsā the son of Maryam
the words of truth about which they dispute.
(Sūrah Maryam 19:30-34)

For Muslims this is their introduction to ʿĪsā ﷺ – this is the first time they see him in Qurʾān and hear him speak – an infant in his cradle – demonstrating who he ﷺ is by what will be the first of his many miracles recounted by Allāh ﷻ. All of those further miracles, there being really no further narrative about ʿĪsā ﷺ in Qurʾān, must be seen against the clear statement of Allāh ﷻ:

مَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ مِنْ وَلَدٍ سُبْحَانَكَ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

It is not [conceivable] for Allāh to take a son.

– limitless is He in His Glory –

When He orders anything to be He says, “BE” and it is.

(Sūratu-l-Maryam 19:35)

وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ أَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمِّي آلِهَتَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ
قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقٍّ إِنْ كُنْتُ قُلْتُهُ
فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ تَعَلَّمَ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ

wa-idh qāla-llāhu yā ʿīsā-b-na maryama ʾaʾanta qulta li-n-nāsi
ʾittakḥidhūni wa ʾummiya ʾilāhayni min dūni-llāhi
qāla subḥānaka ma yakūnu lī ʾan ʾaqūla mā laysa lī bi-ḥaqqin
iīn kuñtu qultuhu fa-qad ʾalimtaḥu taʾlamu mā fī nafsī
wa lā aʾlamu mā fī nafsika innaka ʾaanta ʾallāmu-l-ghuyūbā

And when Allāh says, “ʿĪsā son of Maryam! Did you say to people,
‘Take me and my mother as gods besides Allāh?’ he will say,
‘Glory be to You! It is not for me to say what I have no right to say!
If I had said it, then You would have known it.

You know what is in my self but I do not know what is in Your Self.
You are the Knower of all unseen things.”

(Sūratu-n-Nisāʾ 4:150)



When we speak of the miracles of ʿĪsā ﷺ in Qurʾān, of course the first two are his immaculate conception and virgin birth and then his speaking in the cradle which we have mentioned.

Going beyond that we find, according to the Qurʾān, ʿĪsā ﷺ performed the following miracles by the permission of Allāh ﷻ:

1. He healed the blind.
2. He healed the lepers.
3. He brought the dead back to life.
4. He breathed life into a bird made of clay.

In the Qurʾān, Allāh ﷻ quotes ʿĪsā ﷺ, as saying:

“Truly! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. I make for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird *by the leave of Allāh*. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, *by the leave of Allāh*. And I announce to you what you eat and what you store up in your houses. Surely in this is a sign for you if you are to be believers.

“And (I come) confirming that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful some of that which was forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to Allāh and obey me. Truly Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is a straight path.” (Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3: 49-51).

Allāh ﷻ also tells us about the situation on the Day of Judgement:

“On the day when Allāh gathers together the messengers and says: What was your response (from mankind)? they say: We have no knowledge. Lo! You, only You are the Knower of Things Hidden.

When Allāh says:

Oh ʿĪsā, son of Maryam! Remember My favor on you and on your mother; how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you spoke unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught you the Scripture and Wisdom, the Torah and the ʾInjīl (Gospel); and how you shaped of clay into the likeness of a bird *by My permission*, and you blew upon it and it was a bird *by My permission*, and you did heal the one who was born blind and the leper *by My permission*. (Sūratu-l-Māʾidah 5:109-10)

Some of these miracles are recorded in the the four gospels contained in the Christian Bible but not all.

The fact that ʿĪsā ﷺ spoke while he was yet a baby is not written anywhere in the ʾInjīl. This should not be surprising, because none of the Gospels can claim to recover every single event in the life of ʿĪsā ﷺ. Instead, the gospel according to John seeks to emphasize that the events were too many to record. Similarly, the miracle of breathing life into a bird made of clay is not attested by the Christian Bible. This too should not make us wonder. It is obvious that the writers of the gospels could record only the traditions that were available to them.

What is worthy to notice here is that the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was faithful to the revelation received from Allāh ﷻ and taught his followers about ʿĪsā ﷺ. The religion taught by Allāh ﷻ through Muḥammad ﷺ, however, absolutely denied the divinity of ʿĪsā ﷺ. Any normal human being, therefore, who wished to deny the divinity of ʿĪsā ﷺ would have tried to belittle ʿĪsā ﷺ. Since Christians looked upon the miracles of Jesus as a proof of his divinity, we might expect that any human being who tries to deny the divinity of ʿĪsā ﷺ would *not* have informed people of miracles not previously known to them. He might have even tried to deny some of the miracles recorded in the canonical gospels. On the other hand, the prophet Muḥammad ﷺ honestly and faithfully conveyed the message delivered to him from Allāh ﷻ.

Allāh ﷻ tells us the truth without fear. Human beings trying to win followers tell us only what is conducive to winning us over. They usually withhold information that could lead to opposite conclusions.

On the other hand, Allāh ﷻ informs us about the miracles of ʿĪsā ﷺ even if people use this information to support their prior commitment to the doctrine of the divinity of ʿĪsā ﷺ.

Neither Allāh ﷻ nor the Prophet ﷺ need to win worshippers. Those who worship Allāh ﷻ do so for their own good and they take it all as the Truth from Allāh ﷻ. And those who worship false and mul-tiple gods do so to their own detriment and eventual loss.

What Allāh ﷻ emphasizes, though, is that the miracles of ʿĪsā ﷺ in no way prove he was divine. The miracles he performed were a sign, a proof, that he was a messenger ﷺ from Allāh ﷻ. He performed the miracles with the help and permission of Allāh ﷻ. Those who use his miracles as proof of his divinity would choose to forget the following sayings of Jesus.

“I can of my own authority do nothing.” (John 5:30 KJV) and they also forget the declaration of Peter:

“Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves know.” (Acts 2:22 KJV).

These passages make clear that Jesus did not perform miracles on his own. Rather were accomplished by the leave of God. Jesus also constantly repeated to his followers and those who listened to him that the miracles he performed were by the permission of Allāh ﷻ.

One further miracle we have not mentioned is the Miracle of the Last Supper which has its cognate in Sūratu-l-Māʿidah (5) or “The Table Laden with Food” – named after this miracle of ʿĪsā ﷺ. Allāh ﷻ narrates how the disciples of ʿĪsā ﷺ requested him to ask Allāh ﷻ to send down a table laden with food, and for it to be a special day of commemoration for them in the future. In English it reads:

“When the disciples said: ‘Oh ʿĪsā, son of Maryam! Is your Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from heaven?’ He said: ‘Observe your duty to Allāh, if you are true believers.’ They said: We desire to eat of it and for our hearts to be at rest so that We may know that you have spoken truth to us, and that we may be the witnesses of it. ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, said: ‘Oh Allāh, our Lord, send down for us a Table laden with food from heaven, that shall be for us a recurring festival, the first and last of us, and a miracle from You. And provide us our sustenance, for You are the best of providers!’” (Sūratu-l-Māʿidah 5:112-114)

Since the occasion was to be “for us a recurring festival,” it is more than likely this is what is called the Last Supper and also the Lord’s Supper, Breaking of Bread, the Eucharist, or Communion.

The Last Supper or Eucharist has always been at the center of Christian worship. The Encyclopedia Britannica says:

“Eucharist is a Christian sacrament commemorating the action of Jesus at his Last Supper with his disciples ... The letters of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles make it clear that early Christianity believed that this institution included a mandate to continue the celebration.” As such the Eucharist has always formed a central rite of Christian worship echoing the words we find in Qurʾān,

“ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, said: ‘Oh Allāh, our Lord, send down for us a Table laden with food out of heaven, that shall be for us a recurring festival, the first and last of us, and a miracle from You.’”

So from all of this it should now be amply clear that, leaving aside the question of the Crucifixion and the Divinity of ʿĪsā ﷺ, there are certainly many cognates and parallels between the Jesus narrative as unfolded in the New Testament and the accounts of ʿĪsā ﷺ as revealed by Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān.



In 1968 I took part in one of the first “Interfaith Conferences” in America, which was held at the Benedictine Monastery of Mount Saviour in upper New York State.

By the second day of the three day conference it was completely clear to me that, although all the above was true, we would, and could, never really come to any agreement with Christians because inevitably our attempts at mutual understanding would founder on the question of the the Crucifixion and the Divinity of ʿĪsā ﷺ.

For reasons having to do with trying to bring about inter-community harmony and righting of mis-conceptions I continued to attend these inter-faith conferences held in venues all over the world until in the early 1990’s when I became convinced that there was absolutely no hope in attending such conferences and, on the contrary, it was counter productive in the light of what was becoming almost a new religion and a kind of *faux-spirituel* business called inter-faith.

More than that, and in spite of my Love, as a result of my Christian upbringing, of first Jesus and then ʿĪsā ﷺ I had become convinced at a very deep level that, for the most part and with certain rare exceptions, what is called “Chrisitanity” is almost in entirety a false flag operation.

So you ask, ‘What then is *Christianity*?’ I would say that in reality it is, and especially in Europe and America, Mediterranean paganism mixed with North European forest folk rituals and rites thinly disguised and in Latin America with indigenous native folkways.

Since for a believing Muslim the Qurʾān constitutes the only absolutely True document in the world we can, as I have tried to make clear, certainly find cognates and parallels between the revelation of Allāh ﷻ and many passages in the four canonical gospels as well as certain Coptic, and, even, Gnostic gospels which survived the various Eastern (Greek/Slavic) and Roman Catholic councils which brought about the return of paganism in disguise for, in truth their heritage was, and is, the polytheistic religions of the past millennia.

In my own readings I find in the Gospels of Thomas, Phillip and Mary Magdelene, which were found in 1945 in a sealed earthenware jar containing thirteen leather-bound papyrus codices, together with pages torn from another book, at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt closer parallels to Qurʾānic accounts but, though certain Gnostic narratives hold for informed belief and mystic insight rather than blind belief on the lines of the well known saying, “Who knows his self knows his Lord” (من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه) still there remain always the stumbling blocks of Crucifixion and Divinity.

I know that there are many sincere Christians who both take offense and are deeply shocked by this assertion of Paganism.

But think of the well known and much repeated aphorism that America is a Judeo-Christian nation, when if you simply take a walk around Washington DC it would become abundantly clear, looking at the buildings (the Supreme Court, the Capitol, the White House etc.), that America is not a Judeo-Christian nation, except in its sentimental mind, but rather it a Greeco-Roman nation (with more than a glaze of psuedo-Egyptian Eurpean Free-masonry). No more than, considering its records of foreign wars of intervention (56 since 1786) and slavery would you say America is a peace loving nation dedicated to democracy, justice and freedom for all.

The search for the origins of the Trinity begins with the earliest writings of man. where records of early Mesopotamian and Mediterranean civilizations show the prevalence of polytheistic religions. Even though many scholars assert that earliest man believed in one god, this original belief in one god was replaced by the triads of paganism which were eventually absorbed into Catholic and Greek Orthodox Church dogmas.

Most of ancient theology is lost under the sands of time. However, archaeological expeditions in ancient Mesopotamia have uncovered the fascinating culture of the Sumerians, which flourished over 4,000 years ago. Though Sumeria was overthrown first by Assyria, and then by Babylon, its gods lived on in the cultures of those who conquered. Thus of ancient Sumerian trinity: Anu was the primary god of heaven, the ‘Father’, and the ‘King of the Gods’; Enlil, the ‘wind-god’ was the god of the earth, and a creator god; and Enki was the god of waters and the ‘lord of wisdom’, whilst the Babylonian triad consisted of ‘three gods of roughly equal rank... whose inter-relationship is of the essence of their natures’.

Is this positive proof that the Christian Trinity descended from the ancient Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian triads? No. The historian, Hislop, states, “In the unity of that one, the *Only* God of the Babylonians there were three persons, and to symbolize that doctrine of the Trinity, they employed...the equilateral triangle, just as it is well known the Romish Church does in this day.”

Ægypt’s history is similar to Sumeria’s in antiquity. Ægypt also believed in a ‘transcendental, above creation, and preexisting’ one, the god Amun. But on closer investigation Amun was really three gods in one. Ra was his face, Ptah his body, and Amun his hidden identity. Ra, Amon, and Ptah were ‘combined as three embodiments or aspects of one supreme and triune deity’. Additionally, a hymn to Amun written in the 14th century BC defines the Ægyptian trinity: ‘All Gods are three: Amun, Ra, Ptah; they have no equal. His name is hidden as Amun, he is Ra... before [men], and his body is Ptah’.

From Ægypt came the ideas of a divine trinity. The worship of the Ægyptian triad Isis, Serapis, and the child Horus probably accustomed the early church theologians to the idea of a triune God, and was influential ‘in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity as set forth in the Nicæan and Athanasian creeds.

These were not the only trinities early Christians were exposed to. Another Mediterranean trinitarian culture were the Etruscans. As they passed from Babylon through Greece and on to Rome, they brought with them their trinity of Tinia, Uni, and Menerva. This trinity was a ‘new idea to the Romans,’ and yet it became so ‘typical of Rome’ that it quickly spread throughout Italy. Even the names of the Roman trinity: Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, reflect the ancestry. That Christianity was not ashamed to borrow from pagan culture is referred to by the historian Will Durant who fatuously said: “Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it.”

Is this positive proof that the Christian Trinity descended from the Etruscan and Roman triads? No. but the Church’s respect and attitude toward paganism and for pagan ideas is best summed up in Pope Gregory the Great’s words to a missionary: “You must not interfere with any traditional belief or religious observance that can be harmonized with Christianity.”

In contrast, both ʾIslām and Judaism are strongly monotheistic with no hint of a trinity. The Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) is filled with statements such as ‘before Me there was no G-d formed,

neither shall any be after Me' (Isaiah 43:10), and 'there is no other God...I am the Lord and there is none else' (Isaiah 45:14,18). A Jewish commentary affirms that '[no] other gods exist, for to declare this would be blasphemous...' (Chumash 458). Even though 'Word,' 'Spirit,' 'Presence,' and 'Wisdom' are used as personifications of G-d, Biblical scholars agree that the Trinity is neither mentioned nor intended by the authors of the Old Testament.

So we can conclude without much difficulty that the concept of the Trinity definitely did not come from Judaism. Nor did Jesus himself speak of a trinity. The message of Jesus was of the coming Kingdom; it was a message of love and forgiveness. As for his relationship with the Father, Jesus said, '... I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which sent me', (John 5:30) and in another place, 'My teaching is not mine, but His that sent me'; (John 7:16) and his words 'My Father is greater than I' (John 14:28).

Indeed the word 'trinity' was not coined until Tertullian, more than 100 years after the death of Jesus, and the key words (meaning substance) from the Nicene debate, *homousis* and *ousis*, are not biblical, but come directly from Stoic thought.

Nowhere in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible or Tanach is the Trinity mentioned. Indeed one of the most widely accepted conclusions of the 19th century historians of dogma was that the dogma of the Trinity was not an explicit doctrine of the New Testament, still less of the Old Testament, but had evolved from New Testament times to the 4th century. But if the Trinity did not originate with the Bible, where then did it come from? To find the origins of the Trinity in Christianity, we need to take a look at the circumstances in which early Christians found themselves.

World conditions were hardly conducive to the foundation of a new and different religion. Pagan gods were still the gods of the state, and the Roman government was very superstitious. All calamities were considered to be displeasure of the gods. When the dissolute Roman government began to crumble, it was not seen as a result of corruption within, but as the anger of the gods; and thus there were strong persecutions against Christians to placate these gods.

In such a time was Christianity, as a world religion, born. On one side were persecutions and on the other the seduction of Greek philosophy. To remain faithful to the belief of Jesus Christ meant hardship and ridicule. It was only for the simple poor and those rich in faith.

It was a hard time to convert to Christianity from the relatively safer paganism or even state recognized Judaism. In the desire to grow, the Church compromised doctrinal truth, which resulted in confusion as pagans became Christians and intermingled beliefs and traditions. The emergence of a universal *catholic* tradition coincides with a conflict in the Church after AD 70 which saw the decline of Judaic influence within Christianity. As more and more pagans came into Christianity, they found the Judaic influence offensive. Some even went so far as to reject the Old Testament and held that the “God” of the Old Testament, the angry and wrathful Jewish G–d, was clearly ‘another’ God than the God of Jesus with His emphasis on love, mercy and fellow feeling.

With this background, the growth and evolution of the Trinity can be clearly seen.

As Will Durant also observed, “In Christ and Peter, Christianity was Jewish; in Paul it became half Greek; in Catholicism it became half Roman” and as the apostles died, various writers undertook the task of defending Christianity against the persecutions of the pagans. The writers of these ‘Apologies’ are known to us now as the ‘Apologists’ who took over and adapted the methods and even vocabulary of pagan ‘allegorism’ and began in full the ‘process of accommodation’ between Christianity and the state and folk religion, and used reason instead of love and intelligence rather than mercy to justify Christianity to the Mediterranean pagan world.

Finally, not only was the Church divided by Gnosticism, enticed by philosophy, and set upon by paganism, but there was a geographic division as well. The East (centered originally in Alexandria and then Constatinople) and the West (centered in Rome) grew along two different lines. The East was intellectually adventurous and speculative, a reflection of surrounding Greek culture.

The theological development of the East is best represented by Clement of Alexandria (c.150-220) of the ‘Catechetical School’ of Alexandria, who considered ‘God the Father revealed in the Old Testament’ separate and distinct from the ‘Son of God incarnate in Christ,’ with whom he identified the Logos. Campbell summarizes that ‘[with Clement the] philosophic spirit enters frankly into the service of Christian doctrine, and with it begins...the theological science of the future.’ However, it was his student, Origen, who ‘achieved the union of Greek philosophy and Christianity’.

Origen (c.185-253) is considered by many to be the greatest scholar of the early church and the greatest theologian of the East. With Origen, Christianity ceased to be only a comforting faith; it became a full-fledged philosophy, 'buttressed with scripture but proudly resting on reason'. Origen was a brilliant man. At 18 he succeeded Clement as president of the Alexandrian school. Over 800 titles were attributed to him by Jerome. He traveled extensively and started a new school in Cesarea where he became the 'teacher of such orthodox stalwarts as the Cappadocian Fathers' but also the 'teacher of Arius' and the 'originator of many heresies'. Centuries after his death, he was condemned by various Church councils at least five times.

He tried to reconcile the 'incomprehensible God' with both Stoic and Platonic philosophy, Origen presented views that could support both sides of the Trinity argument. He believed the Father and Son were separate 'in respect of hypostasis' (substance), but 'one by harmony and concord and identity of will'. He claimed the Son was the *image* of God.

In the same way, according to the bible story, we say that Seth is the image of his father, Adam as it is written that: 'Adam begot Seth according to his own image and likeness.' Image, in this sense, implies that Father and Son have the same nature and substance.

He also maintained that there was a difference between *the* God and God. Whatever else, other than he who is called God, is deified by participation, by sharing in his divinity, and is more properly to be called not the God but simply God.'

As Greek influence and Gnosticism were introduced into the Eastern church, it became more mystical and philosophical. The simple doctrines that Jesus taught to his uneducated (and Jewish) followers gave way to the complex and sophisticated arguments of Origen.

As Clement and Origen represented theological development in the East, so Tertullian (c.160-230) had tremendous influence in the West, centered in Rome, which gave greater credence to the traditional role of faith than to philosophy, and was more apt to expound on scripture based on the four canonical gospels and letters.

Indeed it was Tertullian who first coined the term *trinitas* from which the English word 'trinity' is derived. He clarifies thus the 'mystery of the divine economy of the unity which makes a trinity.'

He placed the three in order not of quality but of sequence, different not in substance but in aspect, not in power but in manifestation. At other times he used other images to show his point, such as the monarchy saying: “If he who is the king has a son, and if the son is given a share in the monarchy, this does not mean that the monarchy is automatically divided, ceasing to be a monarchy.” Again, Tertullian explains the concept of being brought forth: “As the root brings forth the shoot, as the spring brings forth the stream, as the sun brings forth the beam.”

Indeed Tertullian did not consider the Father and Son co-eternal: ‘There was a time when there was neither son to make God a judge, nor a son to make God a Father’; nor did he consider them co-equal: ‘For the Father is the whole substance, whereas the Son is something derived from it’. In Tertullian we find a groundwork upon which a trinity concept can be founded, but it has not yet evolved into that trinity propounded in the Nicene Creed.

The world around the early Church was changing. The Roman empire began to crumble and Constantine (c. 272-337ce) came to power. He wished to unify the Empire, and chose Christianity to accomplish this. But Christianity was far from unified.

So Constantine invited the bishops from East and West to join him in the small seaside village of Nicea for a council to unify the church. There were three main groups present at this council: Eusebius of Nicomedia presenting the Arian view of the Trinity, Alexander of Alexandria presenting the Athanasian version, and a very large ‘middle party’ led by Eusebius of Cesarea whose various theological opinions did not interfere with their desire for peace.

Eusebius of Nicomedia submitted the Arian creed first and it was rejected. Then the other Eusebius of Cesarea submitted the Cesarean baptismal creed. Instead of submitting a creed of their own, the anti-Arians only modified Eusebius’ views, thereby compelling him to sign it and completely shutting the Arians out. Those Arians who did not sign were deposed and exiled.

Thus Constantine had his unified Church, which in reality was not very unified. Eusebius of Cesarea was not altogether satisfied with the creed because it was too close to Sabellianism (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit equal three aspects of one God). Indeed Eusebius was uncomfortable enough with the Nicene creed that he felt it expedient to justify himself to his own people in a long letter.

In this letter he states that he ‘resisted even to the last minute’ until the words were examined and it was explained that the words ‘did not mean all they seemed to mean but were intended simply to assert the real deity of the Son...’ In short a ‘doubly’ ambiguous interpretation was authorized by the leaders in order to win Eusebius and his followers.

Eusebius took exception to much of the creed as the words were explained. ‘Out of the Father’s substance’ was now interpreted to show that the Son is ‘out of the Father’, but ‘not part of the Father’s substance.’ ‘Born not made’ because ‘made’ refers to all other creatures ‘which come into being through the Son’, and ‘consubstantial’ really means that the Son comes out of the Father and is like him. It is clear that the council strongly lacked unity of thought. The language of debate on the consubstantiality of Father and Son made many people think that the ‘Church at Nicea had abandoned the genuine Christian doctrine, which was religious through and through, in order to embrace some sort of hellenistic ontology’ In short the Nicene dogma marked the fateful transition from the prophetic Jewish Oracle of Yahweh to Catholic dogma’.

The end result was far less than Constantine had hoped and the Nicene Creed was not a popular creed when it was signed. The majority of Eastern bishops sided with Arius in that they believed Christ was the Son of God ‘neither consubstantial nor co-eternal’ with his Father. Arianism, which holds that the Son was a subordinate entity to the Father, has never been truly quenched. While the West accepted the Athanasian view of the Trinity, and the East accepted the Trinity of the Cappadocian fathers, Arianism lives on in the Unitarian Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Ebionites (new and old) and in many smaller religions.

Historically, this ‘doctrine of God’ has proved to be a bloody doctrine that has no relation to the true God of love, nor His Messenger, Jesus. Durant details the problems that arose from the Council at Nicea and summarizes that period with a dreadful verdict: ‘Probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in these two years than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the entire history of Rome’. Thus they perverted the teachings of Christ: ‘Love thy neighbor as your own self’, (Matthew 19:19) and of his apostles: ‘If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us’. (1John 4:12)

The evolution of the Trinity can be well seen in the words of the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. As each of the creeds became more wordy and convoluted, the simple, pure faith of Jesus and the Apostolic church became lost in a haze. Even more interesting is the fact that as the creeds became more specific and less scriptural, the adherence to them became stricter, and the penalty for disbelief harsher.

In summary, the common culture of the day was one filled with triune gods. From ancient Sumeria's Anu, Enlil, and Enki and Egypt's dual trinities of Amun-Re-Ptah and Isis, Osiris, and Horus to Rome's Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva the whole concept of paganism revolved around the magic number of three. In Greek philosophy, also, we have seen how the number three was used as an unspecified trinity of intelligence, mind, and reason.

This is in stark contrast to the simple oneness of the Hebrew G-d. Jesus was a Jew from the tribe of Judah. He claimed to be sent to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 15:24). His apostles were all Jews. His G-d was the G-d of Israel. His message was one of love, righteousness, and salvation, and he despised the religious dogma of tradition. What a contrast with the proceedings of the Council of Nicea and the murders that followed! He gave the good news of his coming kingdom to the poor and meek: the lowly of this world. He did not require dogmatic creeds that had to be believed to the word, but rather said, 'Follow me' (Matthew 9:9).

There can be no doubt: Jesus was a stranger to all sides of the political proceedings in Nicea. He never claimed to be God, but was content to be the Messenger ﷺ of G-d. His creed was not of words that must be followed to the letter, but rather of spirit: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see G-d'. (Matthew 4:8)

He did not require wealthy and learned bishops to mingle philosophy and pagan polytheism with his simple truth, but blessed the 'poor' and the 'meek'. (Matthew 4:1-12) No, it was not from Jesus that the dogma of the Trinity came.

Is this not positive proof that the Trinity owes its origins to paganism and philosophy? The evidences of history leave little doubt. The concept of the Trinity finds its roots in Pagan theology and Greek philosophy: it is a stranger to the Jewish Jesus and all of Bani Israel from whom he sprang and to whom Allāh ﷻ sent ʿĪsā ﷺ.



I realise I have taken a lot of time and space but I wanted, first of all to make clear to my Muslim brothers and sisters the origination of this truly blasphemous idea, from a monotheistic perspective, of the Trinity, and to those interested Christians and Jews who were willing to follow this discussion just where this idea of the Trinity originated and developed and to make clear that, in Truth and in Reality, it has absolutely nothing to do with either Jesus or ʿĪsā ﷺ.

That being said, the only matter really left to clear up is the Crucifixion or Crucifiction (which hangs on the ‘x’ you will note.” This is both a very contentious and, at the same time, subtle discussion or exposition and one, I feel, which deserves an entire talk in itself especially given the question of vicarious salvation which is crucial to any discussion of what did or did not happen in this respect.

Given that I would like to end with the reputed words of Jesus which I believe Christians, Muslims and Jews can all agree on:

Blessed are...

- the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- those who mourn: for they will be comforted.
- the humble: for they will inherit the earth.
- those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: they will be filled.
- the merciful: for they will be shown mercy.
- the pure in heart: for they will see G-d.
- the peacemakers: for they will be called spiritual children of G-d.
- those who are persecuted because of righteousness: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ ۖ فَسَأَكْتُبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ

wa raḥmatī wasiʿat kulla shayʿin
fa-sāktubuha li-l-ladhīna yattaquun

My Mercy extends to all things

but I will confer it on those who are G-d conscious.

(Sūratu-l-ʿAraaf 7:156)

The true message of Jesus is one of humility, charity, peace, justice brotherly love and mercy not torture and pain which has so warped the world with its message of redemptive suffering and endless war and conflict. Jesus and ʿĪsā ﷺ both teach the transformation of the inner person. Love is the motivation and the Beatitudes provide a way of life that promises wholeness and peace on this earth.



Afterword

When I had finished all that proceeds this I realised that there was something I still wanted to say and had not really said.

This relates to the cover of this essay and to the poster for the talk and the view I have of both Jesus and ʿĪsā ﷺ.

Of course it is not customary for Muslims, or at least certain kinds of Muslims, to use or make pictures of the Prophets ﷺ and other exalted beings of the ʿAwliyā Karām ﷺ but I chose that picture because it represented to me or portrayed for me a “picture” (*mithāl* / مثال) of Jesus or ʿĪsā ﷺ that closely resembles a picture of him that hung in my bedroom when I was a child next to the 23rd Psalm.

1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

The image also reminds me of two ʿāyāt from Qurʾān that attracted me at my beginning when I became a Muslim some forty years ago and which continue to inspire me to the present.

كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ ط

kataba rabbuka ʿala nafsihi-r-raḥmah
Your Lord has written Mercy on His Self.

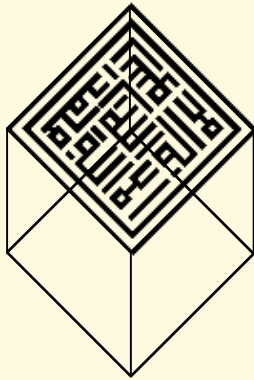
(Sūratu-l-ʿAnʿām 6:54)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

wa mā ʿarsalnaakā ʿillā raḥmatal-li-l-ʿālamīn
and We have not sent you except as a Mercy to all the worlds
(Sūratu-l-ʿAmbiyāʾ 21:107)

wa-llāhu ʿalim





noon hierographers
green mountain
virginia
usa